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Pruning Shade Trees ... with Special Notes on Dutch Elm Disease and Elm Tree Pruning

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Pruning Shade Trees

6-10-70

... with special notes on
Dutch Elm Disease and
Elm Tree Pruning

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Pruning Shade Trees

... with special notes on Dutch Elm Disease and Elm Tree Pruning

By L. L. HELWIG, extension forester; DEAN MARTIN, extension horticulturist; and PAUL COLLINS, associate Experiment Station forester

Shade trees may need pruning to promote their health, improve their appearance, or remove branches that may injure people or property. Examples of such pruning are removal of dead, dying, diseased or broken branches. In some cases you may want to remove low growing or overhanging branches for convenience and safety.

WHEN TO PRUNE

Pruning wounds heal faster if the cuts are made in the early part of the growing season. For this reason it is desirable that most pruning be done in the spring. Practical considerations, however, necessitate pruning at almost any or all seasons of the year. It is well, for example, to avoid pruning maples, birches, and other "bleeders" during the early spring when buds are breaking, even though actual damage caused by "bleeding" at this time is negligible. If you have to prune later in the season, make the cuts before freeze-up.

EQUIPMENT FOR PRUNING

A handsaw with 6 teeth to the inch is adequate for normal pruning cuts. For large cuts use a one-man crosscut saw.

Saws and other equipment especially for pruning are available and a good investment if you do a considerable amount of pruning.

HOW TO PRUNE

Make clean cuts flush with the remaining branch or main trunk. Do not leave stubs. The illustration

gives pruning details. Note that large branches should be undercut first to avoid ripping the bark. Saw about one-third of the way through the underside of the branch about a foot from where the final cut will be made. Saw through the top of the branch about 2 inches beyond the undercut. When the branch breaks off remove the stub with a third cut.

If considerable pruning is necessary, start at the top of the tree. This will allow removal of cut branches that have lodged in the tree, as the work progresses downward.

In most cases, perform the pruning operation so the tree retains its natural shape.

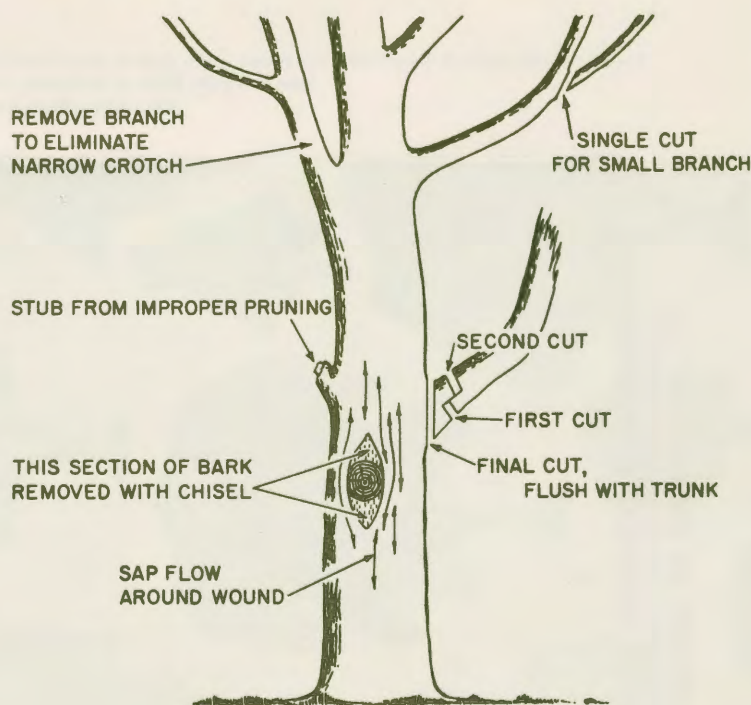
DEHORNING

Dehorning, or the practice of severely heading back the main limbs of an old tree, is rarely justified. When it is necessary to cut ends from branches in a heading back or dehorning process, the cut should be made just above a small branch which is growing in the direction where limb development is desired. If at all possible, the normal shape of the tree should be maintained.

The principle dangers of dehorning are decay, which is almost sure to follow in the cut ends, and sunscald, which results from reduction of shade.

SHAPING THE CUTS

Pruning cuts heal faster if the bark above and below the cuts is removed. Removing bark to form an almond-shaped section parallel to the branch or trunk lets the sap flow around the wound. This promotes faster healing. Use a wood chisel and a hammer or a sharp knife to remove the bark.



WOUND DRESSING

An efficient wound dressing should disinfect, prevent checking, prevent entrance of fungus spores, and encourage healing or callus formation.

Commercially prepared wound dressing materials such as asphaltum and plastic base types have most of these characteristics. These are usually available at garden supply centers. Usually the materials are painted over the wound area with a paint brush. Some materials are available in aerosol form which are convenient for applications to small wounds. If these materials are not available, indoor latex paint or orange shellac can be used.

Retreatments are usually necessary to keep the wound covered until complete healing.

Keep wounds covered with a dressing until healing is completed. This may require renewal of the dressing from time to time.

SAFETY

Any work above the ground is hazardous and pruning is no exception.

1. Keep tools in good condition.
2. Handle tools with care while working in the tree.

3. Avoid working in trees when they are wet and slippery.
4. Watch out for electric lines passing through the trees.
5. When using a ladder, have someone steady it.
6. If you have to climb in the tree, be careful not to put your weight on weak banches.
7. Look out for "widow-makers" (loose branches hanging in the tree).

ELM TREE PRUNING AND DUTCH ELM DISEASE

Elm bark beetles, the principle carriers of Dutch Elm Disease, breed in dead or weakened elm branches. Therefore it is important that such wood be removed by following the pruning instructions listed in the preceding paragraphs. The pruning should include sparsely foliated and heavily shaded branches. Judicious pruning at regular intervals is preferred over heavy pruning at longer or irregular intervals.

Burn, bury or debark all pruned elm wood.

ASK FOR THESE EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS:

- FS 326—Dutch Elm Disease
- FS 183—Thinning Black Hills Pine
- FS 265—Pruning Black Hills Pine
- EC 492—Shelterbelts for South Dakota
- EC 566—Trees for South Dakota
- EL 176—Grazing Ruins Shelterbelts

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John T. Stone, Dean of Extension, South Dakota State University, Brookings.

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